1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

we examine the demographic data and view the amount of illness in the society we encounter situations in which adaptation is unsuccessful. 182

An inescapable conclusion is that Kaska society stands in a precariously balanced condition so far as its comfort and survival are concerned. The population was reduced by at least one-third within the last hundred years. During the period of study, the death rate probably equalled the birth rate, although effective means of birth control are not employed. The Kaska are not a healthy people. All of these facts are indicative of the threat faced by the society in solving the problems of survival. The society itself, however, cannot be held entirely accountable for failure to meet this threat. In the last hundred years the people have encountered many novel problems for which they were not prepared with traditional solutions. Illness, for example, probably increased after the Dease River and Klondike gold rushes. In confronting illness at the close of the nineteenth century, the people lacked even shamanism with which to fortify themselves psychologically against the menace of disease.[10] It would seem that as far as the high death rate and extensive morbidity are concerned, Kaska society is suffering the effects of culture contact. White diseases have taken their toll of the native population not only because the people were less resistant to disease (although their resistance leaves something to be desired), but also because once these illnesses were introduced, the Indians did not receive the same medical protection which reduces mortality in the white society.[11] 182 177 [842] [755]

So far we have exonerated the society from failing to preserve the health and life of its members by pointing out that the strain of adaptation became considerably increased following white contact. We will now consider some aspects of Indian motivation and behavior which, although ostensibly oriented toward survival, are actually contributing to discomfort and illness. The first of these is nutrition. At least during the winter, a majority of the society appears to suffer from inadequate caloric intake plus vitamin and mineral deficiencies. The consequences are seen in reduced energy and heightened susceptibility to disease. Malnutrition extends to children, in whom it may be seriously impairing physical and psychological development. The responsibility for undernourishment cannot be blamed upon a lack of education, since professional advice in food consumption, valuable as it may be, is after all limited to only a fraction of the world; nor can it be ascribed solely to acculturation. The causes for malnutrition appear to lie in the attitudes of the Kaska themselves as well as in conditions of acculturation. To dispose of the second point first, it seems likely that foreign penetration of the area within the last ten years (including the building of the highway, airports, and the noise of aircraft) have resulted in a severe dislocation of game. Such disturbances probably also followed influxes of gold seekers into the country and must be regarded as temporary. Currently, however, they appear responsible for the death of meat 182 146 182 146 177

[10] Honigmann, Witch Fear in Post-Contact Kaska Society (1948), 156.

[11] Marchand, Tribal Epidemics in the Yukon (1943), cited, Honigmann, Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave (1946), 18.

[*] Williams points out that "the noise of road building, including roar of machinery and blasting, has obviously driven wild life back from the Highway. With the quieter conditions of post-construction era, wild animals will doubtless return. . . ." Williams, Geological Investigations Along the Alaska Highway from Fort Nelson, British Columbia, to Watson Lake, Yukon (1948), 7.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Upper Liard

that sometimes dugouts engaged in such contests.[24] People played many games including blind man's bluff, which involved covering the eyes of a player with tanned skin while five or six other participants circled the blindfolded person, who sought to capture them. Both sexes of all ages played hide and seek. Sometimes an object was hidden and its discovery became the object of the game. With a raw skin available children initiated the game of drag-skin, jumping on the skin and trying to hold it back by their weight as it was being drawn by an older person. String figures called for a certain amount of skill to construct designs like a duck, crow, feet, and conical lodge from a length of tanned-skin line. Rope jumping and rope tug-of-war did not come into popularity until contact, and pole tug-of-war, skin-tossing, as well as snapping sticks, could not be recalled as amusement devices. Shamans may have used snapping sticks as part of the curing ritual. Story telling possessed educative value and constituted the pleasant responsibility of old men. A story teller might insist that the audience look him directly in the eyes. Should a young person shift his glance he would be reprimanded by the narrator remarking, "You won't be smart."[27] Private ownership did not extend to folk tales.

Gambling occurred in summer, when a number of family bands gathered together and the weather allowed players to assemble around an outdoor fire. The stick game, of which several alternative forms existed, furnished the most popular medium for betting.[28] Since the pattern of this game has already been described for the Kaska[29] the details will not be repeated here. Mainly the game took place at night, illumination coming from a well-tended fire located between the double line of kneeling players. A steady drumming furnished rhythm to which the gamblers moved hands and body as they challenged the opponents to guess in which hand the wooden token lay concealed. Women as well as men played the stick game but the sexes never competed in the same game. Forfeits consisted of whatever valuables a man chose to offer. Sometimes after playing most of the night a man lost all his resources. With the gambling fever still possessing him he might in the end bet his wife. Should he lose his bet the woman remained with the winner for two or three days before returning to her husband. Marriages rarely broke up as a result of this custom. Sometimes an old man, fearing that the woman would become accustomed to the other man, went to the winner's camp and urged the latter to send her back.

Feasts marked a number of points on the life cycle. Thus parents celebrated the birth

[24] The Tlingit organized three- to four-mile races, run by from three to five canoes. Jones, *Study of the Tlingits of Alaska* (1914), 81.

[27] A Tahltan informant, Beal Carlick, said that among his people a grandfather told many stories about fighting, murder, and warfare. Such deeds were explained as resulting from the evil nature of some men and the craziness of some women. "This was just like school, educate us so we don't lie, don't steal." Stories also possessed entertainment value and filled evenings when there was nothing else to do. "Sit down, listen, don't run around anymore," the informant said.

[28] Stick games were also a favorite form of gambling among the Tlingit. Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 443–444; Jones, *Study of the Tlingits of Alaska* (1914), 122–123.

[29] Honigmann, *Culture and Ethos of Kaska Society* (1949), 174–175.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Upper Liard

Whether following from sorcery or the breaking of some avoidance, illness represented the alienation of a life-giving property (which informants referred to as "wind") from the body or the instrusion of a malevolent substance into the organism.[21] Many but not all illnesses were treated through shamans. For example, any person could alleviate headache by placing a toad on the painful part leaving it there until the animal jumped free. Then the pain would also disappear. A shaman, however, effected cures with the aid of the power that resided in his soul or wind. He did not paint his face while curing but sang and utilized a variety of ritual objects to promote recovery of health. Among the upper Liard River people each shaman freely composed (or dreamed) his own chants. In turn they were heard (and, may it be assumed, imitated?) by persons in the group of relatives who gathered to watch the performance and, as the night wore on, joined in the singing. Sometimes the practitioner "blew" water from his mouth on the sore part of a patient's anatomy or he might drive the illness into a foreign object, like a rock or a small doll that had been prepared by his wife. He pushed the image into the patient's body, causing it to disappear. Then object as well as illness were extracted and quickly stuffed into the curer's pouch. Sucking blood from the head of an ailing person (never for some reason from the hand or arm) also constituted a recognized pattern of doctoring. Sometimes small gophers or weasels were extracted during sucking and these represented the causes of the particular malady. If a person had been rendered sick as the result of killing mink or otter, the shaman occupied himself in extracting one of these animals' "three spirits."[22] Should two souls have penetrated the victim, then death was almost inevitable while all three resulted in severe mental illness. Every shaman carried amulets or "medicines" in his pouch to aid him in his work. Moose excrement and various roots provided effective antidotes which, however, were never taken internally. The selection of these materials probably stemmed from dreams. Remaining unexplained is the custom of planting several sticks, two or three feet high, in front of a patient and filling the spaces between them with moose-hide line.[23] Tattooing never served as a cure.

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you tell me what I am going to kill? Am I going to kill a seal or a bear?' Then the speaker spit upon it and threw it up into the air. If it remained in a certain position after it fell the man would kill something; otherwise he might as well stay at home." (Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* [1908], 457.) Bone tossing is widely distributed in northern North America but was not inquired into among the Kaska.

[22] Tlingit shamans sometimes cured "by passing over the affected parts carved objects supposed to have power." Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 464.

[23] The Tlingit attributed sickness to "witchcraft" and "after pretending to draw a spear or some other foreign object from the sick man, the shaman designated who had sent it into him." Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 464.

[24] One of our informants (O) revealed a little about curing ceremonies among the Ross River Tutchone. As many as four shamans sometimes sang over a patient, persisting until they collapsed (in a trance?), "just like they're dead." As they lay unconscious an assistant flexed their legs to prevent stiffening. During their unconsciousness the shamans went "under the ground" to retrieve the sick man's wind.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Upper Liard

Certain therapeutic rites required silence in order to be effective. These a shaman performed at a considerable distance from the sick camp, never within range of the sound of barking dogs. Probably under such circumstances a healer caused a sorcerer's evil to recoil on the latter. Detection of a sorcerer was easy if it happened that somebody remained conspicuously absent from a curing ceremony. Against the absent one the shaman directed the finger of guilt.

Confession helped to diagnose illness resulting from broken avoidances and apparently also possessed curative value in itself. The shaman asked, "You ever bother your sister?" "You ever kill an otter?" "How you kill mink?" "You ever steal?" When the patient had admitted an offense the confessor warned him not to repeat the deed upon recovery.

Following contact with Europeans a hunter came to perform a ritual to alleviate intense cold. He fired a dry root ("wolverine medicine") from a shotgun. Informants did not recognize the reference to "lucky number." The preceding material, however, suggests strongly that the number "four" possessed special significance. Apart from love songs, which may have been used with the idea of magically attracting a member of the opposite sex, love magic occupied little attention.[84]

As already indicated people sometimes used their magical power against other people. For example a reputed shaman who felt slighted or ridiculed might use sorcery in vengeance against his real or fancied detractors. People took care not to annoy a shaman. He should be "only pleased," said an informant. A man whose temperament favored sorcery sought to increase his power by dreaming of animals like the mink and otter but not all persons were sorcerers whose power emanated from these species. A sorcerer tried to "steal" his victim's wind, perhaps first securing a piece of the latter's clothing. Burial of such a possession in the ground brought about death. (Note the use of burial in this context.) A person suspecting sorcery might pay to have his wind returned. In this way really malevolent practitioners extorted women. Sorcerers meted out not only death but also illness, physical and mental, and also "troubled" a man by ruining his hunting ability. A good hunter knew that he had been sorcerized when, seeing a moose, he failed to strike the animal with his weapon. Black magic held a danger of mental illness for the evil magician, who in some cases was also executed with the community's consent. Sorcerers, however, could evade execution by slipping through their enemies' hands. An informant related a story about two Tlingit shamans, one of whom was evil. They both flew through the air. The good man disappeared after a time but his

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The wind had gone so far away that the patient was close to death. During the interval of unconsciousness nobody might leave the dwelling. After perhaps four hours the men simultaneously returned to awareness and renewed their singing. Part of the paraphernalia used in the rite consisted of a line strung with feathers. This the practitioner lashed around the patient's wrists and used to pull the latter from his bed. In that way he was pulled back to life, the informant explained. The pattern of going into a trance to retrieve an errant soul is close to the Eskimo pattern of shamanism. The line fastened to the patient recalls Eskimo divination customs.

[84] Love magic has been reported for the Tahltan. In one particular variety a white root was obtained from the ground and rolled into pellets. The woman's image was then drawn on a piece of skin and enclosed with the pellets. If the charm was to be successful the pellets moved and at the same time the woman found herself attracted to the magician.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Dease River
Tsetsona

784 *Dease River Kaska.* Many of the animal avoidances common among the Upper Liard people were shared by the Dease River Indians. Danger came from the mink and otter, while the killing of a toad always produced illness. People fed moose, caribou, and beaver flesh to dogs, and informants did not admit to having been careful in disposing of moose hairs. Women ate any part of an animal that a man used for food. Dream animals, from whom power had been obtained, were avoided for food but whether completely or only in part we did not learn. Illness followed violation of such taboos. Young men and women drank lightly of water, apparently in order to maintain their strength.[88] No [834] restrictions on youths' drinking grease were admitted. A man avoided coitus with his wife for one night before going to hunt.

224 Shamans made hunting magic by singing magical animal songs accompanied by other men. Singing also operated in curing ceremonies. Any person with some power, even a 755 youth, might perform healing magic. Should the disease not be relieved, increasingly more powerful (reputed?) shamans would be solicited. Successful cures enhanced a practitioner's reputation. In addition to confession, techniques of doctoring included blowing into the person to restore the latter's soul when it was believed to have been stolen through sorcery. A shaman also sucked intrusive disease from the body, revealing stones or very little animals that had caused the ailment. Sometimes a practitioner blew his breath into a vessel containing water for the sick man to drink.

754 Sorcery involved the capture of another person's wind. This produced illness. Any man with sufficient power could succeed with malevolent magic, or else the services of a stronger shaman guaranteed successful completion of the deed. Only evilly disposed men accepted such employment, indicating that in-group sorcery met with disapproval. The man who produced illness could also cure it and sometimes offered to do so in exchange for a payment of skins. Suspected black magicians inspired fear and respect. No physical sanctions appear to have been directed against their activities.

787 Scapulimancy was practiced. The bull-roarer possessed magical power and a man swung it for magical assistance, to chip stone successfully and also to bring about milder weather.

784 *Tsetsona.* Certain animals aroused great fear and were never trapped. These included 825 the flying squirrel, toad, mink, and otter.[89] To kill one of these creatures promised that one's children would sicken and die. The wolf and wolverine were also avoided for fur

[88] Before marriage a Tlingit boy's uncle told him: "Do not drink too much water or it will make you lazy." Swanton, *Social Conditions, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 428. See also above, p. 107.

[89] For the Bear Lake Sekani attitudes of respect have been reported regarding the wolf, toad, salamander, and otter. "The Indians around us had many superstitions regarding wolves; a rifle that killed a wolf would soon kill a human; or a person born at a certain time must never kill a wolf, because if he did, his nearest female relative was certain to become insane." Children were startled when shown toads. "It was quite taboo for them to touch or get near 'frogs.' Such an action meant death or illness and all sorts of horrible things." To touch salamanders "might mean that a man would lose all his worldly possessions." Otter skulls were preserved by the youngsters and would not be surrendered to the naturalists lest the "mother would be possessed by the spirits of the three departed otters and eventually become insane." Seaswell-Fletcher, *Naturalists in the Wilds of British Columbia* (1948), 131, 137, 221.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Tsetena
Frances Lake

and food but they do not seem to have possessed the same dangerous potency as the mink, for example. The informant denied any general avoidance of the otter. Rather some people paid more regard to him than others. Clarification of this statement could not be secured. Perhaps a man who enjoyed otter power felt less fear for that animal. Following their introduction in numbers, dogs came to eat the meat of any animal but not the leg tendons or intestines of the moose. Avoidance of these foods preserved the dog's endurance.

A young man observed a number of food avoidances designed to develop capacities for hunting. He drank water lightly, since many animals disliked water. Avoidance of the beverage magically helped a man to obtain greater power over game. He also ate sparingly of leg tendons, moose intestines, and moose brains lest his quickness and resistance to fatigue become impaired. The successful tracking of large game depended on speed. No grease taboos were known. Except during menstruation when a woman avoided fresh meat, women ate the same foods eaten by men. Avoidances designed to develop hunting power did not apply to women. As the informant explained, "Game don't want him, that woman." Dream animals played no part in the diet, not being eaten in whole or part. Some shamans never ate porcupine or beaver and others rejected the head of moose. These observances would seem to be auxiliary to the taboo on the meat of the animal sponsor or may represent a partial contradiction of that statement. Cohabitation taboos prior to hunting were denied.

Frances Lake Kaska. Attitudes toward the otter are described by Pike.[a]

> A curious superstition prevails that if you kill an otter it is capable of causing much trouble by coming to life again in your stomach. Only three winters ago a Francis Lake woman lay at death's door with this malady, but she was saved by the timely arrival of the only medicine man left in the tribe. He seems to have diagnosed the case correctly at once, and holding a sheep's horn spoon to the patient's mouth, he proceeded to repeat a long incantation suitable to the occasion. As soon as he had finished, to the great joy of all the relatives who had gathered to see the death, three little otters dropped out into the spoon. The old lady recovered rapidly, and afterwards confessed to having stolen and eaten an otter that she had found in somebody else's beaver trap during a long period of starvation in the early summer.

Hunting rites included depositing an unidentified "medicine" on a moose track, either to attract the animal back to that spot or to make him more vulnerable to the hunter's arrow. After spreading other substances around a beaver house the hunter would sit down to await the appearance of the game. Scapulimancy could not be recalled. The wearing of animal figurines cut from bone insured success in hunting.

Sucking provided the commonest means of curing but other conceptions of illness coexisted with the notion of intrusion that sucking suggests. A young man carefully

[a] Pike, *Through the Subarctic Forest* (1896), 145. Field reports that "The Pellys and Little Salmons believe that very near all sickness comes from the otter and mink and if anybody kills one, they or some of their near relatives will get sick and die. If any should happen to kill an otter or mink and skin it, he generally will use some old knife and throw the knife away when he is finished. He believes by doing this he guards against getting sick as the sickness is in the knife. Also if you touch or kill a frog your limbs will lose their strength, and you will get poor. Your flesh will gradually waste away till you die." Field, *Unpublished manuscript* (1918), 6.

6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Frances Lake
Upper Liard
Dease River

755 [783] [754] [784] pointed out that in illness all the wind did not leave the body—this would have caused death. To cure, a shaman blew some of his wind into the patient's body. No recollection of confession was admitted but Field's anecdote above suggests that practice. Sorcery sometimes resulted in death, or was believed to have that power. The avoidance on making snowshoes before snow lay on the ground obtained among the Frances Lake people as it did in the upper Liard Valley.

MEDICINE AND SURGERY

757 It appears that, compared to the magical rites discussed above, relatively less dogmatic attitudes governed the methods of therapy to be described in this section. Some of the techniques to be discussed may even have been supported by an awareness of their empirically verifiable relationship to the desired end.

757 278 *Upper Liard Kaska.* Charcoal rubbed under the eyes prevented snow blindness. To cure the affliction the sore eyes were bathed in infusions of alder or tamarack bark. No help for snow blindness came from the application of spruce gum nor was bleeding ever used for this purpose. Spruce gum helped to treat blisters, while the young flowers of the fireweed boiled in water provided a drink that relieved muscular pains. An unidentified white root (negata), with an odor as penetrating as horse-radish, growing in mountainous country cleared up head congestion resulting from colds. After grinding it and mixing it with grease, a sufferer breathed the root through each nostril in turn. Sweat [515] baths afforded protection from colds. Both sexes took such baths regularly from about the age of ten. Men preceded women in the sweat lodge. Bathing in the sulphurous hot springs of the Cassiar possessed no therapeutic value.[42]

757 757 278 *Dease River Kaska.* People used balsam gum to staunch the flow of blood from a cut and then bound the wound with dry grass. The same substance applied to the inner corners of each eye relieved snow blindness without bandaging. Snow blindness was caused by small "white bugs" springing from the snow into the victim's eyes. Snow also harbored small black insects (ta?uctetla?) that had no injurious effects on human beings.[43] A tourniquet prevented fatal bleeding in case of a severed artery. Animal grease or brains relieved the pain of burns. Broken bones were set by shamans, the limb being stretched and tightly bound with a layer of grass wrapped around with tanned-skin line. The casing remained in place for several months or until the break healed. Snowshoe "sickness," manifested by aching in the toes and insteps, could be relieved overnight by wrapping and binding the feet with grass. To thaw frozen parts of the body people gently rubbed snow on the affected part. Also the frozen organ might be immersed in extremely cold water. Remedies for toothache were denied. Emetics are probable but their nature could not be recalled precisely. To treat colds, urine in a vessel was heated with a hot pole. The patient then crouched over the liquid, his head covered with a skin, and inhaled the fumes. Presumably human urine is indicated.

[42] For some contemporary remedies, a few of which, like the inhalation of urine fumes, probably have roots in the aboriginal period, see Honigmann, *Culture and Ethos of Kaska Society* (1949), 247.

[43] "Small black worms" were thought by the Fort Nelson Slave to cause snow blindness. Honigmann, *Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave* (1946), 132.

7: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1947
ND12 Nahane ND12

The pattern that emerges from these reports may be briefly summarized. A serious illness would overtake some member of one of the small semi-nomadic bands. An effort was made to explain the illness in terms of bewitchment and generally some child or youth of either sex was fixed upon as the guilty party. Often the child confessed to the crime which he did not understand. "Kid not smart," Sam Bob explained. "You talk to kid, 'You witch?' Maybe say, 'Yes.' That kid big, he wouldn't speak a word." Sometimes the confessed witch was killed or else he might starve to death. If the suspect refused to admit his guilt he was tortured until he confessed. The commonest means of torture seems to have been by tying up the suspected individual, sometimes hanging him up by the heels and starving him. The remarkable thing that comes out of the data is that the captivity and torture were often undertaken by a member of the suspect's family, again either a man or a woman. A mature person often sought to escape the charge of bewitchment by leveling suspicion on a child. During periods when witch-fear was prevalent people were afraid of being accused of the deed and of having guilt placed on their children. Mutual suspicion was rife and people watched their children carefully.

From this synthetic reconstruction it is clear that the Kaska's belief in witchcraft is best described as witch-fear, since there is no evidence of any Indian ever actually practicing witchcraft nor were the forms of such behavior apparently even ideally patterned in great detail. Thus witch-fear for the Kaska may be defined as an attempt to fix blame for malignancy upon one person for some definite injury to another. Certain other features of Kaska witch-fear may be pointed out. Very often it was not the supposed victim who sought to fix this blame but his relatives and friends. Furthermore all suspicion of witchcraft was localized within the community and often within the family. Blame did not depend upon any previous expression of enmity between victim and witch, for frequently suspicion fell on a child who could not easily have originated or been the subject of such hostility. Finally there was no elaboration of techniques for countering the attack of witchcraft. Shamanism had practically disappeared from the society and oracles were not consulted to determine witches. The sole remedy appeared to lie in securing the confession of the witch and/or bringing about his death. It therefore follows that witchcraft was not a commonplace or "normal" phenomenon in Kaska society as it is, or was, among the African Azande or California Yokuts and Western Mono.[11]

Although Dan, Jimmy, and Clem Loots are still living in Lower Post, efforts to persuade them to talk about witch-fear or witchcraft were unsuccessful. A number of other informants expressed impatience when questioned about this behavior and pointed out that they knew nothing of witches. They

[11] Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Gayton, 1930, p. 400.